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THE EXHIBITIONS.

V.—FOURTEENTH ANNUAL EXHIBITION OF THE AMERICAN WATER COLOR SOCIETY.

(OPENED JANUARY 24. CLOSED FEBRUARY 23.)



GOOD ADVICE.

By C. S. REINHART. — FRAGMENT, FROM A SKETCH
BY THE ARTIST.

WHEN one sees a great painting occupying a niche by itself, like Raphael's *Madonna* at Dresden, the impression it leaves on the memory is vivid and enduring. But when one passes from gallery to gallery, and views a miscellaneous collection of works of every style and variety of merit, the effect produced is vague and transitory. Still more difficult is it to form a pronounced opinion regarding the most salient and important works of an exhibition, when it presents an even average of merit, and does not very materially differ from previous shows. Nevertheless, every such display suggests certain characteristics of its own which are not unworthy of record; and which, even if intrinsically unimportant, are at least relatively valuable in marking the growth of taste and culture. For example, we observe in the present Water Color Exhibition a laudable and quite satisfactory attempt to decorate the staircase of the Academy with exotic plants, that seem in keeping with the tropical temperature of the corridors, and pleasantly invite the visitor to an inspection of the display on the walls. The carol of canaries also rings melodiously through the building, and contributes to the attractions of the occasion.

The catalogue for this year is the most elaborate and ambitious yet offered to a long-suffering public in this country. It contains eighty-two sketches of such works as the Committee considered representative. Some of these are spirited, and they are generally superior to those of

previous catalogues, and well printed, if we consider how brief a time was allowed the printer. But the paper of the catalogue is altogether too cumbersome to be carried in the hand for hours; it is also a mistake to leave the edges uncut. The fashion is well enough for works of importance that are to be expensively bound for a library. But in a catalogue which the owner must consult every minute, uncut edges are not only exceedingly inconvenient, but they are also a manifest affectation of a style that is entirely inappropriate to the requirements of such a brochure.

The number of exhibited works exceeds that of any previous year in the history of the Society. Its success last year was such that many who had never employed aquarelle before were stimulated to compete. As a result, over twelve hundred works were submitted, and seven hundred and fourteen were accepted. These are, without exception, water-colors; statuary, engravings, and cameos having been refused for the first time, owing partly to the preceding exhibition of the Salmagundi Club. The number of water-colors is, therefore, more significant than ever before. As regards the much vexed question of quality it must be frankly admitted that there are few such striking and original pictures as give point to some exhibitions, either by their great superiority or excessive badness. Thus the first view is, if not exactly disappointing, at least somewhat confusing. But repeated observation surprises one with the fact that the general average of merit exceeds that of any previous exhibition of



THE TOWER OF ST. MARK'S.

BY SAMUEL COLMAN. — FROM A SKETCH BY THE ARTIST.

piece, we are profoundly impressed with the force of individuality daring to represent nature from a new point of mental vision. This is the secret of Mr. Colman's success; he has depicted a familiar scene as transfigured into fresh vitality by his imagination. It is no exaggeration to say that this superb picture ranks with the finest works of the English water-colorists, and has not been surpassed by any American painter. A noticeable fact is that this is in every sense of the term a legitimate water-color, free from the slightest suspicion of body color. This, by the way, is also a prominent feature of the Exhibition in general, indicating growing knowledge and technical dexterity in our painters. We are convinced that the abundant employment of body color arises from inability rather than a genuine conviction that its use adds to the quality of a picture. Of course, if an artist cannot paint without it, by all means let him employ it; but in such case why not frankly use oil colors, which are far richer than aquarelle, dulled and rendered opaque with white-lead? Mr. Lyman, who will be remembered for his moonlight effect of last year, is also favorably represented among the leading water-colorists of this season. His *Sunset near Magnolia* is a delicious bit of atmosphere and color. The tints are managed with great purity, and the warm reflections of the glowing light in the west are exquisitely rendered on the glassy surface of the languid water idly kissing the shining beach. An admirable noonday scene, by Hamilton Hamilton, is in an entirely different vein. It represents a country bridge over a brook, and, just beyond, a wayside farmhouse and a picturesque clump of poplars. The values are rendered with masterly fidelity, and the color is pure and sparkling. It is one of the most clever works of a very able collection.

Mr. R. Swain Gifford contributes a number of admirable and characteristic landscapes, of which *The Sand Dunes of Naushon* appears to be the most remarkable. In a hollow between grass-tufted mounds of sand, beyond which the purple ridge of ocean is visible, we see a clump of gnarled and twisted cedars, full of the sentiment of dreary desolation and solitude. They seem like the spirits of Indian chieftains of past ages, left there to

native art in America, excepting, perhaps, that of the *Salmagundi* in December. It is worthy of note that the balance of excellence inclines in these water-colors to the side of landscape art, although the figure painters are represented by a number of notable works, and it must be admitted that they show gain every year. Considering the general high quality of the selections made, in spite of the catholicity shown in the admittance of all schools alike, and that for lack of room some good works are reported to have been rejected, one is at a loss to explain the presence of a few exceptionally disgraceful attempts at art. We do not wish hastily to condemn any work, and always gladly admit extenuating circumstances, such as youth or inexperience. But we cannot see any merit, or even promise, in such pictures as 628, entitled *Minnehaha delirious with Famine*, or 655, entitled *Smoke*.

It is with pleasure one turns from such caricatures to a couple of masterly works by Mr. Colman. *The Tower of St. Mark's*, and *Sunset after a Shower, Venice*, represent subjects so absolutely gone in triteness that they are moribund. But the magic touch of genius can almost raise the dead to life. How many hundred times, from Canaletto to the present day, have these scenes been painted, and yet, when we look at the well-known dome and canal in this sunset



OAKS NEAR PORTLAND, MAINE.

BY GEORGE H. SMILLIE. — PHOTOTYPIC FAC-SIMILE OF A SKETCH BY THE ARTIST.

wrestle with their destiny, while their people have gone with the long departed ages. Ruskin decries the sentiment which invests objects of nature with human interest. He considers it a sickly outgrowth from modern theories. In reality it is old as the birth of man. The Greeks imagined every tree to be a dryad; every voice and object of nature had to them a human or vital attraction. As long as man exists the sight of the material will quicken the immaterial to action, and man will see in nature types of his own mortality.

In Mr. George H. Smillie we behold an artist who has not only already achieved notable success in water-colors, but also promises to surpass any of his previous efforts. It is with great pleasure that we note his exhibits from year to year. Of several excellent works in the present Exhibition by this artist, *Near Portland* is especially noteworthy, representing with firm, yet delicate and suggestive tints, a tree-fringed slope overlooking the sea on a dreamy day in August. *Oaks near Portland, Me.*, and several scenes on Lake George, are equally good in quality. Mr. Shurtleff also merits kindly mention for the improvement perceptible during the year's work in landscape aquarelle. He exhibits nineteen works this time. Nothing is more satisfactory than the evidence of progress in the right direction. While gratified by his efforts in this field, it may be permitted us to hope, however, that Mr. Shurtleff is not going to abandon the pursuit of animal painting, which he has followed so well, while so few of our artists succeed in it. Mr. James D. Smillie offers a very forcible composition, suggested by a stanza in *Lucile*, "Old trees to the blast," etc. A group of storm-beaten pines stands on the rocky brow of a bluff by the wind-furrowed sea. A canopy of heavy clouds broods over a wild and desolate scene. The effect is powerful and poetic. But as a technical success his quiet rustic scene called the *Mariner's Well* seems more agreeable.

The ambitious and highly elaborate paintings of Mr. W. T. Richards, representing scenes on the wildly picturesque coast of Cornwall, demand careful attention. They combine the most painstaking regard to details with a breadth of effect that is in the highest degree solemn and impressive. In this respect they belong to the better order of the nearly extinct school of Pre-Raphaelism. In subject and treatment they are closely allied to the works of John Brett, one of the founders of that school, who retains his devotion to its principles, while his early colleagues have gradually adopted later styles. But Mr. Richards is most unfortunate in his scheme of color, which verges on a sickly green, that pervades even the sky with a tone that is very rarely, if ever, seen in nature.

Numerous other landscape works of promise and merit are hung in these galleries by Bellows, Van Elten, Gibson, Champney, Bauer, Crane, Farrer, Parsons, Robbins, Parton, Rood (the author of a recent work on the philosophy of color), and a number of others, which our limits unfortunately forbid us to describe. It is to be regretted that so few of the dashing water-colors of Mr. F. Hopkinson Smith are exhibited this year. The impressionists are represented by such artists as Currier and Bunker. The former offers some brilliant effects of color, chiefly sunsets. Of course they are only splashes of color that seem to have been spilled at random over the paper. But if one stands far enough away from them he shall see these dabs resolve themselves into a certain method that really suggests nature with considerable power. Near-sighted people, however, must resign themselves to the melancholy fact that this art is not for them. In Mr. Bunker's *Dandelion Clock* we see the commencement of a most charming composition; but that is all. Perhaps in the next Exhibition the artist may gratify our curiosity by giving us the completion of what promises to be a lovely picture. Mr. Winslow Homer has a number of coast scenes in this Exhibition, in that style which is peculiarly his own. It properly allies him with the impressionists, but impressionism in his hands is sometimes highly effective. This year, however, Mr. Homer seems less successful than usual: the ideas he has grappled with are poetic and artistic, but they have apparently overpowered him.

The works of Mr. Murphy, which have met with such success in this Exhibition, show unmistakable signs of a mind that sees nature from an original standpoint. He is an excellent technician, but this is not a prominent trait in such good company. The merit of Mr. Murphy's work is subjective. Doubtless he might resent the term: we mean that the sentiment or human element in nature is what he sees, rather than its material aspects. For this reason he selects a class of scenery which touches the minor chords of the soul. For a young man this is an unusual key to strike; but his sympathies appear to be those of one who has lived long, and knows the tragedy of life from experience. A sere hillside on a dark October afternoon, and a slender, leafless birch or maple, faintly outlined against cold gray clouds, form, one may say, the character of most of this artist's compositions. It is the pathos of Mr. McEntee's subjects, treated with more simplicity, and occasionally the vagueness of Corot, but with a dangerous approach to sameness in the type selected. We say dangerous, because when a young artist so early begins to follow one stereotyped idea there is fear that what now seems like promise may too soon degenerate into mannerism, the doldrums from which so few escape who once have fallen into them. As Mr. Murphy's style and treatment are both original and attractive, and therefore likely to become popular and produce a number of imitators, we regret that he finds it necessary always to leave one of the lower corners of his foregrounds unfinished, with no object to balance the rest of the composition. The consequence is that the picture conveys the impression of being cut off, and leaves something to be desired. A bit of rock, a shrub, — something, however slight, it matters not what, — thrown in there, would at once relieve the eye. His persistency in this peculiarity leads us to fear that it is a deliberate affectation, and an affectation or mannerism coddled and tenderly

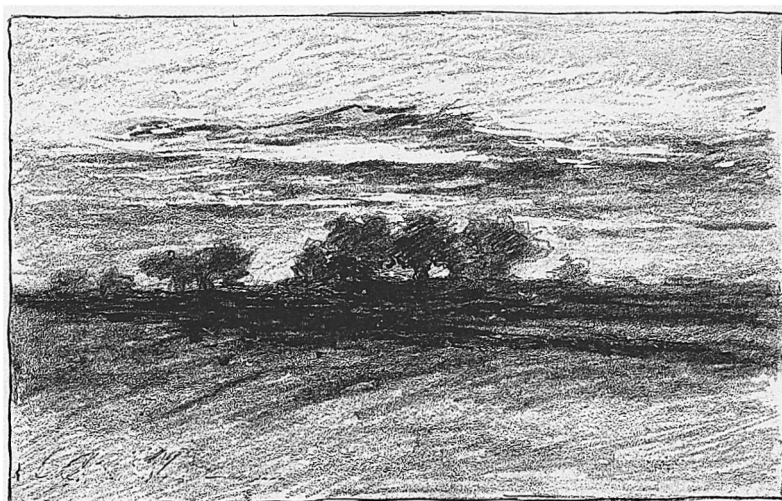
nursed is the most perilous enemy that can befall a young artist. In the works of Mr. Blum we find this evil even more pronounced. He is an artist of unquestionable ability and promise. But what can we say when we see picture after picture by him without any foreground, or rather giving the idea that there was one, which he has erased preparatory to painting in another? The foreground, except in what is technically called a foreground picture, should of course be subordinate to the middle distance, or the subject-motive of the picture. But no foreground at all, only a blank space! Heaven defend us from the plague of such artistic affectations, which threaten to prove a pestilent bane to the genius of some of our most promising artists. What, for example, could be much more effective in its way than Mr. Blum's group of women in his charming composition, entitled *Venetian Bead Stringers*? But the effect is ruined because he left it unfinished, that is, with the lower half of the picture all but a piece of blank paper. A few suggestive touches, at least, would have taken away the bareness from a work for which he asks a good price, *unfinished*. A sketch is one thing, and a picture is another; the two cannot by any means be combined, any more than you can combine oil and water colors. That Mr. Blum can finish a *motif* harmoniously throughout is well known. This present manner of his is as much an affectation as the affectation of a ball-room belle.

Marine painting is strongly represented in the present Exhibition. Mr. H. P. Smith's two small pictures call for no special notice; they exhibit the prominent faults of his style. But in his *Mid Ocean* he gives us an effect quite equal to the grand coast scene he had in the *Salmagundi*. A vast breadth of ocean, on an average day at sea, with the long swell succeeding a storm, is here rendered with great majesty. Mr. Smith is gradually stealing some of the secrets of the sea. The sky is also capitally painted. The impression is impaired, however, by a defect that most landsmen and too many coast painters fail to appreciate. The ship is far too small for her dis-



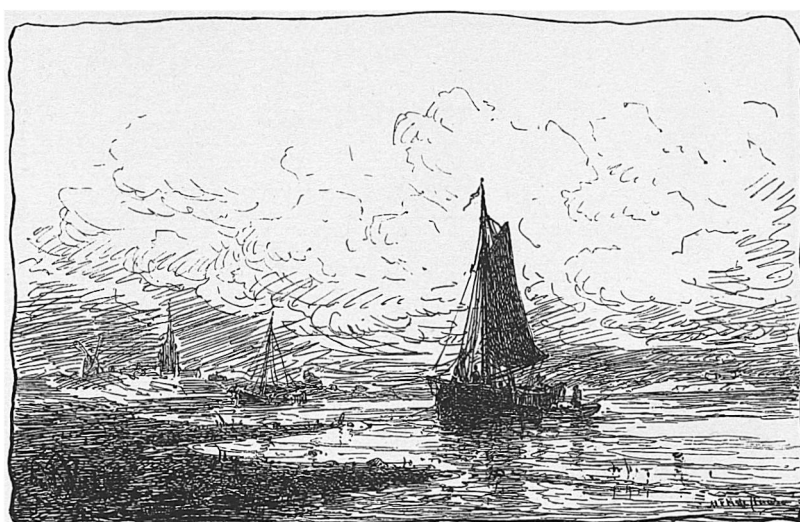
BASIN HARBOR, LAKE CHAMPLAIN.

BY R. M. SHURTLEFF. — FROM A SKETCH BY THE ARTIST.



LANDSCAPE.

BY J. FRANK CURRIER. — FROM A SKETCH BY F. S. CHURCH.



DUTCH RIVER SCENE.

BY M. F. H. DE HAAS. — FROM A SKETCH BY THE ARTIST.



A STUDY.

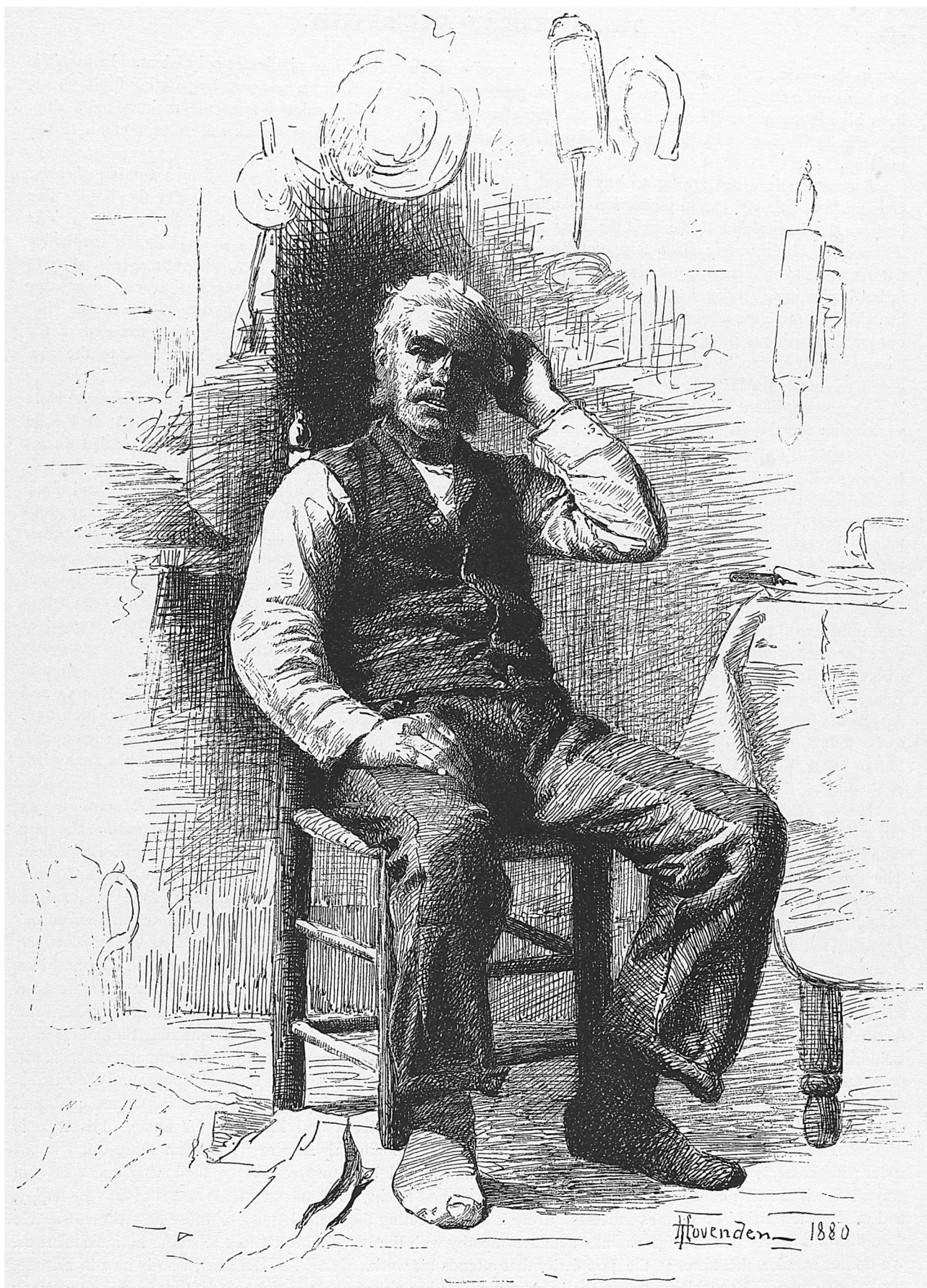
BY J. LEON MORAN.—FROM A SKETCH BY THE ARTIST.



THE CUP THAT CHEERS.

BY T. W. WOOD.—FROM A SKETCH BY THE ARTIST.

tance. This is not a mere matter of guesswork; it is a question of absolute calculation, which any seaman can verify. It is a thousand pities that fine marine paintings are so often injured by inattention to the simplest points in the perspective of wide spaces. Mr. Quartley by no means does justice in this Exhibition to the fine talents that have so rapidly earned him reputation. He is evidently trying to work into what may be called marine genre. His figures show that he is yet a beginner in this field, while no ship could ever stand up with such clumsy and tremendous sticks for masts as those in the vessel called *Hastening to Port*. Nor do his landscapes have that crispness and richness of effect we are accustomed to look for in some of his coast scenes. Messrs. Nicoll and De Haas are admirably represented here,—the former by several of his strongest coast scenes, including spirited and tenderly colored bits from the little known cliffs of Block Island; and the latter by characteristic scenes from Holland's dykes and sand-circled shores, rendered with that rare felicity in seizing the picturesque elements of the sea and of shipping which give such brilliance to his style. Mr. Fred. S. Cozzens, a young artist of considerable promise and an excellent draughtsman, has in this Exhibition two meritorious works. One, entitled *Now then, Bill*, represents two seamen shoving a boat into the water. The men are drawn with spirit and truth, and the scene is racy with the salt flavor of the sea. *Dreary* is the name of another of his contributions. The sky is overcast with a haze, as on a calm day in winter preceding a storm, when the light wind is veering uneasily from one quarter to another before it settles down to blow. Messrs. F. A. Silva and Granville Perkins are characteristically represented by good examples of their styles. The former shows perhaps increased softness of color, except in the well-drawn composition entitled *In the Horseshoe*, in which the water verges on a brassy hue. Mr. Perkins shows to advantage in the spirited *Fishing Boats at Sandy Hook*, and a poetic *Sunset off the Coast of Florida*. Mr. Hitchcock is a new aspirant for atten-



THE PUZZLED VOTER.

BY T. HOVENDEN. — PHOTOTYPIC FAC-SIMILE OF A SKETCH BY THE ARTIST.

tion in the picture called *From my Window*. It is well enough executed, but indicates only talent. In *motif* it is too plainly a copy of the works of Mesdag, his master. Mesdag struck out a new path by painting fishing-boats from his window above the beach. His pictures give the idea of being painted from the maintop of a ship. The effect will do occasionally, but should not be done too often, as very few besides sailors ever climb to the maintop.

Portraiture does not appear to any extent in this Exhibition, but genre is illustrated by a number of clever compositions, although less in proportion to other branches of art than is to be desired. On the border line between landscape and figure painting may be placed a pleasing fancy by Mr. F. S. Church, entitled *The Flamingo*. In a watery glade a scarlet flamingo is sedately standing in a pool, contemplating a meditative nymph who sits on a green bank, dressed in a white robe. It is simply a fanciful idea, without a special story to it, but is pleasingly rendered, and serves to carry us for a moment away from the hard, practical prose of every-day life. A little more expression in the maiden's face would have greatly added to the interest of the scene. But our younger artists of the figure are far more interested at present in giving the surface rather than the soul of the "human form divine." For a higher appreciation of the mystery of humanity we fear we must look to the succeeding generation of artists.

Altogether different in character is Mr. Peter Moran's *A Street in the Pueblo Toas, New Mexico*. Here we have an actual scene, which at the same time is to most observers strange enough to be ideal. At first sight one imagines it to represent a bit of Egyptian or Syrian architecture and genre. But we soon discover that we are to look for the original in our own country. Mr. Moran has painted it well. The adobe houses are evidently true to nature, and the groups of mules and "natives" wrapped in figured ponchos are rendered with spirit, and made to appear as picturesque as if they were Zeïbêks or Khoords of Asia Minor. We cannot avoid a feeling of gratitude to Mr. Moran for so forcibly directing the attention of our artists to the true field which fortune has laid before them, whether in genre or historical painting. Without in the least detracting from the importance of such works as Gérôme, Leighton, Alma Tadema, Lindenschmidt, or our own Bridgman, have executed with such brilliant success, we submit that their subjects come rather under the head of archæological than historical art. The true field of historical painting is to reproduce the spirit of contemporary life and events. Paintings thus inspired at once become historic records to the succeeding ages. Catlin long ago pointed out the real direction for our figure painters to follow; but, instead of seeing the magnificent subjects presented to them, our artists have gone to Europe and devoted their attention to Italian, French, and German peasantry, or the composition of Roman and Assyrian events, which have been already better painted by their masters. Many of the noble scenes which were to be found on this continent have vanished before the march of civilization. A few yet remain, such as Mr. Moran has represented. Now is the time to paint them. Where are the artists who are to immortalize themselves by identifying their genius with these remarkable scenes?

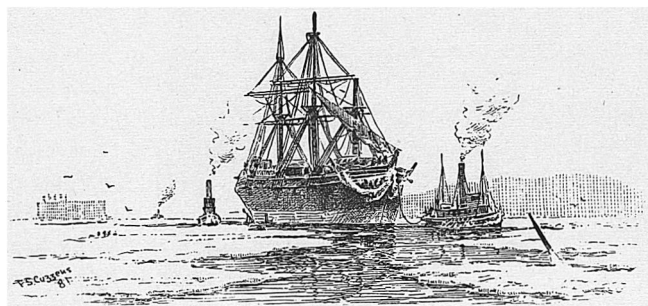
Messrs. E. Percy and J. Leon Moran, the sons of the well-known marine painter, Edward Moran, are not unworthy representatives of a family that is probably unsurpassed for the number of artists it includes. They are both youths under twenty, but already indicate great ability, and contribute excellent pieces to this Exhibition. The three examples of genre which Mr. Hovenden contributes entitle him to a place among our foremost genre painters. No. 22, *Calling to Rest*, is somewhat Jules Bretonish, but the other two bear unmistakable signs of original power. *The Poacher* is rather a blind title, and the picture is a copy of an oil painting he had in the Academy last year, which, however, does not detract from the remarkable skill it displays. *The Puzzled Voter* is evidently a home scene, representing a man seated, in his shirt-sleeves, on the morning of election day, and in a deep quandary as to which side "his bread is buttered." It is an admirable composition. What we note as a strong trait of this artist's style is the earnest and successful effort he makes to depict character and emotion in the faces of his *dramatis personæ*. Such pictures will live when your simpering and smirking Simonettis and Boldinis are lost in well-merited oblivion. Praise of this unqualified kind may seem to need tempering, and it will be permissible to add, therefore, that the legs of Mr. Hovenden's figures incline to unusual length, and their hands are large, even for the massive European peasantry which he loves to depict. The same important quality of characterization is noticeable also in Mr. Wood's *The Cup that Cheers* and *Thinking it Over*. His style is somewhat too elaborate, too little suggestive, to please those who can only admire "the latest thing out" in art styles; his color is also somewhat garish sometimes, and would be improved by the mellowing effect of cool grays. But it must be conceded that in choice of subject and fidelity to character Mr. Wood is often very happy, and we have few artists who are as successful as he is in interpreting the mental traits of those he represents. He does this to a degree that brings us into actual sympathy with the homely honest folk to whom he introduces us. We do not wonder, therefore, at the popularity that attends his work. Mr. C. S. Reinhart, who is now in Europe, sends two compositions which indicate the improvement he has already gained since going there. Like too many who have to work rapidly for the magazines, he has been content to represent the surface side of his art, which arouses admiration rather than sympathy. The progress we note in these pictures, which are entitled *Good Advice*, and *On the Seine, France*, show improved color in the latter, and better appreciation of character in

the former. He will send yet superior work ere long if he continues to improve at this rate. Mr. Bricher has a number of favorable compositions on exhibition in the new field he has struck out for himself. We see no evidence of deep feeling or inspiration in these elaborate works, but they are good specimens of what hard labor without those motives can accomplish. *The First Love Letter* is the best thing of the sort we have seen from his easel, but the lady lies on the top of the grass rather than in it.

Messrs. Eakins, Satterlee, Symington, De Luce, Kappes, Beckwith, Weldon, Newell, Pyle, McCutcheon, Muhrman, and Volkmar, Miss Jacobs, and others we might mention, but for space, contribute genre compositions of more or less merit and originality. In still-life Mr. W. J. Linton sends a number of bird and fruit pictures, executed with a fine sentiment, which serve to illustrate the versatility of one who is at once engraver, water-colorist, editor, author, and critic. Miss Abbatt exhibits a finely composed and painted flower-picture. It is to be wished, however, that the vase stood on a firmer basis than is apparent. Attention must also be called to Mr. Hewson Hawley's admirable architectural paintings. The one representing Rouen Cathedral is especially fine. If Mr. Hawley had a keener sense of the preciousness of light these works would be far more interesting. In other respects he ranks with the best draughtsmen in America.

This Exhibition has been pecuniarily the most successful in the history of the Society. Within a fortnight from the opening more money had been received from sales than the total of last year, which was considered highly favorable. There is one feature of the Water Color Exhibitions that requires a passing word. The tendency to extravagance in frames should be checked. Water-colors are killed if framed so that the picture is smothered in a mass of passe-partout and heavy mouldings. It is not the cost of the frame that helps the painting, but its fitness to the work which it sets off. The American inclination to carry everything to a boundless extravagance is becoming quite too prominent in the frames of our annual art exhibitions.

S. G. W. BENJAMIN.



DREARY.

BY F. S. COZZENS. — FROM A SKETCH BY THE ARTIST.